

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)

photo: NRCS - Pat McGrane



Helen Blender and her son Kent (center) review the status of their Wetland Reserve Program contract with Richard Hayes, Resource Conservationist for NRCS at York. The Blender's enrolled 105 acres of a playa basin wetland into WRP. The seasonal wetland is behind them. Earlier in the year, there was enough water for neighbor children to float on innertubes in the wetland. Kent Blender said, "With WRP we have a better wetland for wildlife and we can graze it during the dry seasons. NRCS explained right up front what we should expect with this wetland."



Blender land before WRP - 1999



After project March 2001



May 2001

The Wetlands Reserve Program is a voluntary land-retirement program to assist eligible landowners in restoring and protecting wetlands using three options. These options include permanent easements, 30-year easements or restoration cost-share agreements.

The main focus of WRP in Nebraska has been to provide quality habitat for wildlife and migratory birds, including threatened and endangered species. Other benefits of wetlands include water quality, flood storage, erosion control and recreational opportunities.

Nationally, WRP authorizes land enrollment up to a total of 1,075,000 acres by the year 2002. This popular wetland restoration program has already reached the maximum acreage level and will need Congressional approval to be funded in FY 2002. Congress limits the number of acres that can be enrolled each year. As a result, other conservation agencies or organizations can provide additional assistance to reduce landowners' share of the costs if needed to encourage participation.

For permanent and 30-year easements, Nebraska has funded 148 applications from 1994 through 2001 covering

nearly 20,000 acres. Voluntary restoration cost-share agreements total 20 on 5,537 acres. Currently there are 100 applications for \$10.0 million on 10,000 acres.

In Nebraska, the types of WRP restoration projects most often fall into the following categories: playa restoration, floodplain restoration, and riparian corridors.

The main focus of playa restoration is for migrating birds, while the primary emphasis for floodplain restoration is to contain flood flows and to improve and protect water quality. Riparian corridors connect protected areas, providing a safe corridor for wildlife. These restoration activities often involve filling in drainage ditches, breaking subsurface tilelines and planting native upland vegetation.



June 2001

photo: NRCS - Dick Hayes

photo: NRCS

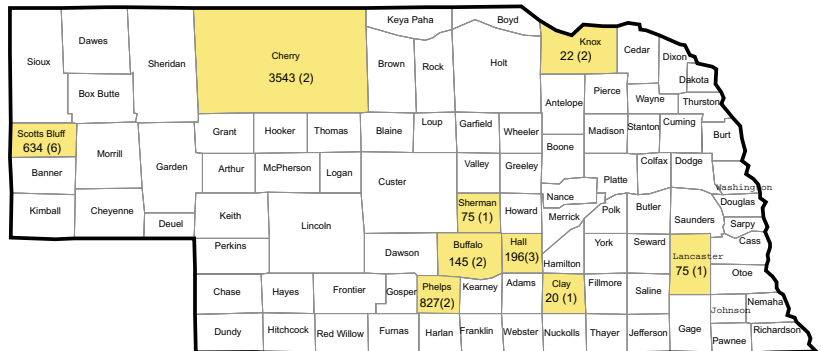
As a national agency, the NRCS has the primary administrative responsibility for WRP, but it also has the authority to develop cooperative agreements with outside conservation groups who can assist with its implementation. NRCS also can delegate its authority for monitoring, managing, and enforcing easements to state or other federal agencies that have the resources to do the job.

Almost any former or degraded wetland is eligible for WRP, as long as the wetland is restorable and will provide wildlife benefits. The exceptions are wetlands covered in violation of the swampbuster provision of the 1985 Farm Bill, land established in trees under the Conservation Reserve Program, and federal land.

Eligible lands include:

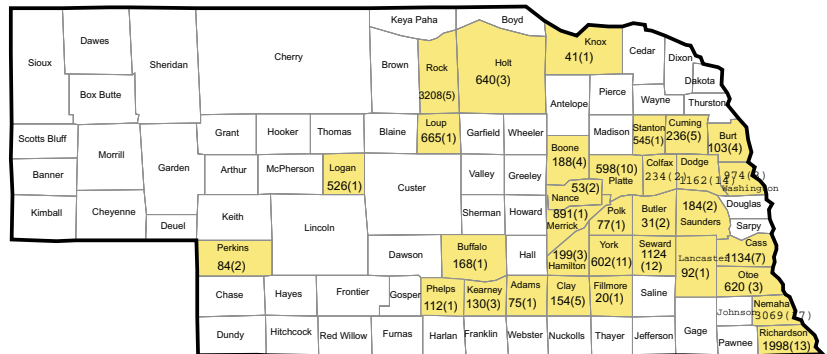
- ❖ Prior converted cropland
- ❖ Wetland farmed under natural conditions
- ❖ Farmed wetland
- ❖ Farmed wetland pasture
- ❖ Farmland that has developed wetland functions as a result of flooding
- ❖ Rangeland, pasture or production forest land on which hydrology can be restored
- ❖ Other associated wetlands
- ❖ Riparian areas that link protected wetlands
- ❖ Associated uplands

WRP Restoration Cost-Share Agreement Acres/No. of Contracts (cumulative)



Totals Agreement Acres = 5,537 Agreement Numbers = 20 Agreement Dollars = 485,222

Wetlands Reserve Program and Emergency Watershed Program (cumulative) Easement Acres/No. of Easements



Totals Easement Acres = 19,943 Easement Numbers = 148 Easement Dollars = 21,251,180

photo: Eric Fowler, NE Game & Parks Commission



NRCS helped the private landowners enroll 870 acres of the Spring Lakes-Timperly Tract near Stanton, NE into the WRP. The landowners later sold this land to the NE Game & Parks Commission for expansion of the Wood Duck Wildlife Management Area. A ceremony last July dedicated the land as part of the management area. Other conservation partners also contributed to the purchase of the land.

NRCS State Conservationist Steve Chick, (right) and NE Game & Parks Commission Wildlife Division Director Kirk Nelson (left) visit with Lancaster County farmer Robert Richmond and his wife Pat during a news conference at the Richmond farm. The news conference was held as part of National Wetlands Month in May. The Richmonds have enrolled 54 acres of Saline wetlands plus 38 acres of surrounding upland into the Wetlands Reserve Program. As a result, several of Richmond's neighbors and the City of Lincoln have made inquiries about enrolling other land into WRP.



photo: Eric Fowler, NE Game & Parks Commission

